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# A survey of Scottish fishermen ahead of Brexit: political, social and constitutional attitudes

Craig McAngus<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

There is a substantial amount of literature that focuses on the governance of offshore fisheries in Europe and abroad, the history of fishing industries in different countries, and anthropological studies of fishing communities around the world. There is also a large amount of literature that explores the attitudes of fishermen towards fisheries governance and management. However, there is very little research that has explored the political attitudes of fishermen through the use of quantitative survey data. Using a survey carried out just ahead of the referendum on the UK's membership of the EU, this paper analyses data from a sample of Scottish skippers who work on vessels over 10 m in length. The paper focuses on how fishermen in Scotland vote at both UK and Scottish elections, how they voted in the Scottish independence and EU referendums, their political and social attitudes and their demographic breakdown. On the EU referendum, the paper finds that fishermen, as well as intending to overwhelmingly vote to leave the EU, did so for instrumental reasons in the belief that this course of action would benefit them and their industry.

## Introduction

There is a sizeable body of literature that provides insights into the lives of fishermen, their families, their communities and their industry. From a social science and humanities perspective, the disciplines of history, sociology and anthropology have provided the bulk of this research. Notable histories of the fishing industry in the UK (Robinson 1996) and other countries such as The Netherlands (Van Ginkel 2009) provide an account of the social, technological and regulatory changes that have occurred over the past few centuries. More sociological and anthropological studies that penetrate the communities themselves have provided an insight into the reproduction of fishermen's and their families' identities (Nadel-Klein 2003; Williams 2008), gender roles (Gerrard 1995; Grant 2004; Nadel-Klein and Davis 1988) and what it means to define a community as a fishing community (Brookfield et al. 2005; Jacob et al. 2001). Recent research in the field of economics has examined how fishermen respond to regulatory authorities (Drupp et al. 2016), and there is a well-established literature focussing on the attitudes of fishermen towards the regulation,

management and governance of fisheries in countries like Spain (Amigo-Dobaño et al. 2012; Garza-Gil and Varela-Lafuente 2015), Denmark (Christensen et al. 2007), Ireland (Reilly et al. 2015), the USA (Lowery et al. 1983; Pierce and Mozumder 2014) and Panama (Hoehn and Thapa 2009). Political science however has focussed little on fishermen themselves and their communities, focussing instead on matters of governance and policy-making, mainly at the supranational level (e.g. Christensen et al. 2007; Coull 2001; Daw and Gray 2005; Gray and Hatchard 2003; Khalilian et al. 2011; Long 2016; Shackleton 1986; Steel 2016; Symes 1997).

Despite this literature, survey methods have hardly been used to study the political attitudes of fishermen. The UK's referendum on membership of the EU proved an invaluable opportunity to survey fishermen in order to gather such data. The UK indeed voted on June 23rd 2016 to leave the EU, and the UK Government is currently negotiating with the EU over what the UK's relationship with the EU will look like in future, fisheries being an important element of this. Although this vote will undoubtedly affect the entire UK population, there are few groups who will be as directly affected as fishermen. The Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) has a direct and everyday impact on the work of fishermen but the policy has been heavily criticised and ultimately blamed for many of the troubles that the industry has faced. Therefore, it was little surprise to find that fishermen in the UK were overwhelmingly in favour of leaving the EU (McAngus and Usherwood 2017).

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In Scotland, the EU referendum resulted in a majority (62%) voting to remain in the EU compared to the UK as a whole voting to leave (52%). This has meant that there is a greater chance that a second referendum on Scottish independence will be held in the coming years. Indeed, the SNP's leader and First Minister of Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon, made a statement the morning after the EU referendum stating that her government would look 'to secure [Scotland's] continuing place in the EU and in the single market in particular' (Office of the First Minister of Scotland 2016). This stance has been strongly opposed by representatives of fishermen in Scotland, with the Chief Executive of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, Bertie Armstrong, stating that Scotland should, regardless of the result of the referendum, move outside the CFP (Financial Times 2016).

In the context of developments surrounding Brexit in Scotland, fishermen will undoubtedly be a dissenting voice given that the vast majority of organised groups, trade unions, business and political parties in Scotland were firmly behind a Remain vote. It is therefore clear that fishermen in Scotland will be one of the most symbolically important 'Scottish' anti-EU campaign groups, yet little is known about what they think about constitutional change, how they vote and what their socio-economic attitudes are. This paper aims to fill this gap using data from a sample of a survey sent out to skippers in the weeks leading up to the EU referendum. A sample ( $N=69$ ) of Scottish skippers who work on and/or own vessels over 10 m was collected and forms the basis of the empirical data.

The data gathered from the survey allows for the exploration of three main themes that build upon existing knowledge of fishermen, namely skippers. The first of these is demographics. Who are Scottish fishermen? The second relates to the political beliefs and values of fishermen. How do fishermen in Scotland vote? Do they differ ideologically from the rest of the Scottish population? The third refers to attitudes towards the EU and, specifically to Scotland, the constitutional relationship that Scotland has with the UK. How do fishermen feel about the EU and the CFP? How did they vote in the Scottish independence referendum in 2014? Although the exploration of these themes is of interest in its own right, it also opens up potential avenues for further, more in-depth research in future using survey methodology or qualitative methods in future.

## Who are Scottish fishermen?

Williams' (2008) study into the lives of fishermen in the North East of Scotland provides a strong basis upon which to explore the demographics of fishermen in Scotland. Williams' work on the identity and gender dynamics in fishing households and communities offers both deep and rich insights that are fairly recent. One theme of Williams' (2008) research is that the changing nature of the fishing industry is resulting in fewer

young, local men going into the industry. Furthermore, fewer sons who have fathers in the industry are taking up the family profession and considering fishing as a career. The decommissioning of vessels has a role to play in this (Khalilian et al. 2011), but a pertinent theme in Williams' (2008) work is the breaking down of the familial and community connections and traditions when it comes to manning fishing vessels. It is therefore expected that the skippers in the sample will tend to be older.

As Williams (2008: 112–113) describes, being a fisherman is an extremely dangerous and gruelling profession that requires a high level of skill and accumulated experience. Apart from the necessary qualifications required, becoming a 'good fisherman' is something that is largely developed through hands on experience as it is a difficult profession to 'teach' in a controlled setting. This evidence alludes at a group of individuals who would tend to not possess recognised qualifications beyond those they are required to obtain at Further Education institutions such as colleges. With regard to religion, Clark (1982) states that religion is an important way of dealing with the uncertainty and danger of being a fisherman and can act as an important part of social life in the local community. We would therefore expect to see a higher level of religious affiliation compared to the Scottish public as a whole. Finally, there is a perception that fishermen belong to traditional family units. Williams (2008: 225) states that 'at the centre of a 'good' fishing household is a capable fisherman's wife' who is able to manage the household, raise children and look after onshore business related to the vessel when their husband is at sea. Other research has shown the important role that women play in supporting fishermen (Nadel-Klein 2003; Nadel-Klein and Davis 1988), and so it is expected that a relatively high proportion of fishermen would be either married or involved in a long-term relationship.

## The politics and values of Scottish fishermen

There has been very little research carried out which investigates the voting habits of Scottish fishermen. Goodlad (1993) offers some commentary on developments within the Scottish fishing community that point towards a group of people that are non-collectivist and sceptical of trade unions, arguing that fishermen do not need the institutions of organised labour in order to negotiate pay and conditions given that most of these issues are handled within communities and discussed amongst crew members. Goodlad (1993) does state that fishermen are unlikely to support Scottish Labour on this basis and so are more likely to vote for the Scottish Conservatives or the Scottish National Party, although the paper offers no empirical evidence to verify these assertions. These claims are also two decades out of date, with the political landscape in Scotland vastly different now compared to the early 1990s. Contrary to

Goodlad's claims, research in areas heavily associated with fishing in Newfoundland suggests that fishermen will vote for a centre-left party if it allies with their interests, in this case supporting the Liberal party (Copes 1970). Despite this study providing more substantial empirical evidence to verify its claims, the data it relies on is aggregate in nature and therefore cannot account for the behaviour of individual fishermen.

According to Goodlad (1993: 51), 'the individualistic and entrepreneurial nature of a fisherman's life runs counter to the philosophy of socialism and collectivism'. One would therefore expect that fishermen are more likely to vote for the Scottish Conservatives who are the main centre-right political party in Scotland. Scottish Labour does not possess historic electoral strength in many constituencies that contain traditional fishing communities. Memories of the inefficient and expensive fish handling system operated by the unionised fish porters in Aberdeen and the general lack of a tradition of trade unionism within the Scottish fishing industry (Goodlad 1993: 51) suggest that this is a group that is not naturally conducive to voting Labour or other left-leaning parties.

In contrast to the more collective and unionised industrial working class, fishermen rely on self-sufficiency and a sense of freedom to succeed in their profession (Power 2005; Van Ginkel 1999). Williams (2008: 120–123) highlights how increasing interference from regulatory authorities hampers the sense of freedom that fishermen enjoy and constrains their independence, leading to a number of them quitting the industry all together. This evidence would suggest that this group who would likely be sceptical of state interference and so will therefore be more libertarian than the public as a whole. Based on this, as outlined above, it is expected that more fishermen will vote Conservative than any other political party in Scotland given that this party best reflects their values. Furthermore, this would also signify that fishermen in Scotland were more likely to oppose Scottish independence in favour of remaining in the UK at the 2014 Scottish independence referendum given that voting Conservative in Scotland is strongly linked to unionism (Anderson 2016; Hassan 2017; Pattie and Johnston 2016).

## Scottish fishermen, the CFP and Brexit

It is a widely held perception that fishermen in Scotland are very Eurosceptic. However, this notion has not been verified using survey data. The CFP, the probable root cause of this acute Euroscepticism, is seen as a crucial turning point in the history of the fishing industry and has been an important element in fishermen portraying themselves as the victims of an overly bureaucratic and unsympathetic governance regime (Williams 2008: 125). As Coull (2001: 115) explains, a 'consequence of the various structural and enforcement problems of the CFP is that there has been widespread dissatisfaction

with its shortcomings' and it has 'proved exceedingly difficult to achieve the joint goal to which lip service is regularly paid in policy statements: that of biological sustainability along with economic viability'.

Despite calls for the CFP to take into account the social impact of its consequences, progress on such fronts has been questioned (Symes and Phillipson 2009). Indeed, the European Commission has developed policies to increase labour market mobility amongst fishermen, but these schemes have been criticised for not taking into account local and cultural factors into account adequately enough (Pita et al. 2010). Overall, The CFP has undergone numerous reform processes in its history but problematic and unpopular elements within it persist (Markus 2010). The CFP has been criticised for being too distant and top down which has undermined the legitimacy and the aims of the policy (Gray and Hatchard 2003; Symes 2001).

Generally speaking, the regulation of fishing operations are designed to reduce pressure on stocks but can often increase the pressure on fishermen and lead to decreased safety at sea (Kaplan and Kite-Powell 2000). Around the world there is a desire amongst fishermen to have a greater say in fisheries management, and 'co-management' has been a slogan used to describe processes aimed at decentralising decision-making structures (McCay and Jentoft 1996). Furthermore, because total allowable catches (TACs) are decided annually in the EU Council of Ministers not only on the basis of scientific advice but through influence from political considerations by member states (Daw and Gray 2005), the feeling that fishermen are simply bystanders in decisions which deeply impact them is thus understandable.

This evidence suggests that fishermen are in favour of leaving the EU, although it is common knowledge that this is the case. Nevertheless, the empirical data analysed in this paper can measure the size of the majority in favour of leaving the EU. What is unknown, however, is whether or not this Euroscepticism is instrumental with regard to fishermen's livelihoods or more general in nature. If fishermen equate and justify their Euroscepticism because leaving the EU will make them and their industry more prosperous, then we can say that it is indeed instrumental. However, if it is driven by other concerns, such as immigration, then it is likely to be more general in nature and not unlike the population as a whole (Clarke et al. 2017; Goodwin and Milazzo 2017; Henderson et al. 2017). It is expected that their Euroscepticism is more instrumental in nature given the direct and explicit impact that the CFP has on their everyday lives. Questions asked in the survey allow for the exploration of this assumption.

## Methods

The data analysed for this paper was collected via an online survey that was distributed to skippers across the UK.

Therefore, any reference to ‘fishermen’ in this paper is shorthand for ‘skippers’. In order to get the online link into the email inboxes of fishermen, representatives of fishermen’s associations and producer organisations across the UK were approached and asked to distribute a link to their survey amongst skippers who were members or affiliates of their association. A number of producer organisations declined to distribute the survey because they wanted to maintain a politically neutral position ahead of the EU referendum. Fishermen’s associations turned out to be the most willing to distribute the survey, although a number of them did not reply to emails. Whether or not they distributed the link to the survey is therefore unknown. Significant barriers therefore existed when it came to getting the survey to fishermen, and it is well known that internet-based surveys are likely to result in a lower completion rate than other data collection approaches (Cobanoglu et al. 2001; Kaplowitz et al. 2004; Shih and Fan 2008). In the absence of external funding for this project, however, it was the only avenue open to the researcher.

The focus of this paper is Scottish fishermen who skipper and/or own boats over 10 m. The reason that only boats over 10 m was considered for the analysis is twofold. Firstly, the UK government collects information on boats based on whether a boat based on whether they are over 10 m in length or 10 m and under (Gov.uk 2016). Because such a sizeable proportion of the over 10-m Scottish fleet was collected ( $N=69$ , 12.4%), it allows us to generalise to the entire over 10-m population with a fair amount of confidence and operate with a reasonably small margin of error. It is almost certain that there is a mismatch between the number of registered > 10-m boats and the number of skippers and owners, but these are the best estimates available. Therefore, the error in the sample is estimated to be somewhere in the region of 7 to 9%. Furthermore, the existence of sample bias may well be present in the sample of skippers that was collected given that the survey was distributed online and may well be more easily accessible to younger respondents. However, the fact that the internet is now easily accessible on most modern vessels and the use of online technology at sea for communication purposes, the existence of a significant amount of bias is not envisaged.

Clearly, this sample does not represent every fisherman that works in the industry as deckhands have not been surveyed at all. This was outside the scope of this particular research project due to financial and logistical constraints. The second reason for focusing on the over 10-m fleet was that smaller boats may fish closer to shore and so not potentially not fall under the auspices of the CFP.

Many of the questions in the survey were taken from the Eurobarometer poll and the British Election Study. In particular, the British Election Study contains a large Scottish subsample and so allows us to compare the results of particular questions asked of fishermen with those asked of the Scottish

public with a good degree of confidence as to their reliability. The BES contains a number of different waves, one of which was carried out just before the EU referendum and therefore at the same time as our own survey. All analysis using the BES will draw upon this particular wave of the survey.<sup>1</sup> Further, separate research will be conducted using the entire sample of UK fishermen (see McAngus and Usherwood 2017). Figure 1 shows the geographic distribution of survey responses with each red circle representing a harbour where a respondent’s boat is registered to and number contained referring to the number of responses. The bulk of responses came from skippers and owners with boats registered in Peterhead, Fraserburgh, Banff and Lerwick. This distribution broadly reflects the geographic location of the over 10-m vessels in the Scottish fleet.

Fishermen are worthy of study for the fact that they reside in distinctive communities that are clearly discernible from others. Indeed, with the decline of heavy industry in Scotland, fishing communities and all who are members of those communities perhaps represent the last of what could be labelled ‘traditional working class’ communities. This is not to say that communities of people who are working class no longer exist, but communities strongly centred around particular occupations, such as coal mining or shipbuilding, are substantially less numerous than they were only a few decades ago. As Smith and Potts (2005: 7) explain:

It is undoubtedly true that the communities of people concerned with the development of sea trade and resources, and other human activities, have been in some senses separate and distinctive throughout long spans of human history. The separateness was, if anything, highlighted by the commercialization and industrialization of the global economy over the past half-millennium. Thus seafarers - commercial and naval, and fishermen - have remained in distinct communities such as seaports, naval bases and fishing villages for centuries, and have lived lives that were relatively isolated from the land, inevitably leading to differences in traditions and outlook.

There are therefore two clear justifications for surveying fishermen. The first is that they are members of a community that is quite distinctive from the rest of Scottish society with regard to heritage and traditions. Second, it is likely that they will differ from the rest of Scottish society because they are members of distinctive communities. According to Williams

<sup>1</sup> Wave 8 of the BES was collected in May and June 2016 and, as such, closely corresponds to the period when the data for this paper was collected. Within this dataset, there is a Scottish  $N$  equalling 2484. Wave 8 of the BES is available here: <http://www.britishelectionstudy.com/data-object/wave-8-of-the-2014-2017-british-election-study-internet-panel-daily-file/>



**Fig. 1** Map showing geographical spread of survey responses in Scotland



(2008: 230), ‘fishing identities are part of a strong, coherent discourse that is shared by those who live alongside and work within the industry’. Furthermore, the ‘lived, learnt and shared nature of being part of the fishing industry provides a strong and coherent discourse from which individual and collective identities are constructed’ (Williams 2008: 231). We would therefore expect to see some differing social and political attitudes between fishermen and the general public on this basis.

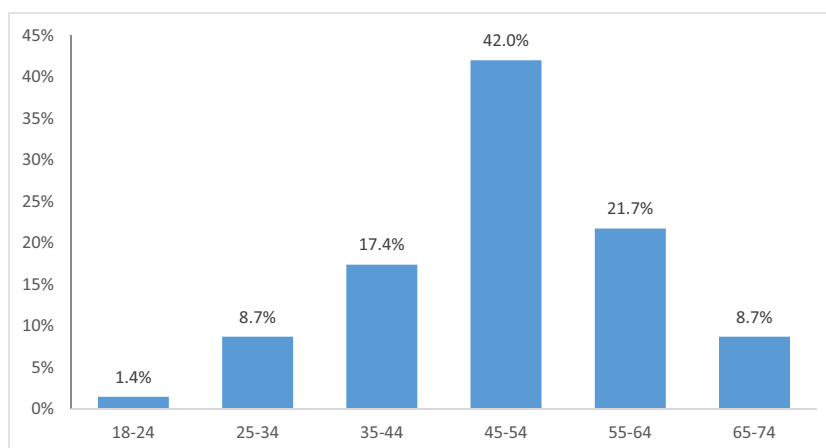
### Who are Scottish fishermen? A demographic overview

Figure 2 shows the age distribution of Scottish fishermen and illustrates that, at least when it comes to skippers and owners,

it is a profession that is dominated by older men. Just over a quarter (27.5%) of skippers and owners are below 44 years of age, with the remaining 72.5% being 45 years of age or older. It is impossible to compare the age distribution of skippers say three or four decades ago, although it is likely that skippers even then would have tended to be older. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assume that, given the changing nature of labour in the fishing industry, the mean age of skippers is significantly higher now than it was in the past.

The majority of fishermen (54%) possess standard grade qualifications as their highest level of educational attainment, with a very small proportion possessing degree level qualifications (Fig. 3). Traditionally, fishermen would enter the industry at a relatively young age, often following the footsteps of their fathers and older brothers. Despite, on average, possessing lower educational attainment than the Scottish

**Fig. 2** Age distribution of Scottish fishermen ( $N = 69$ )



public as a whole, the idea of fishermen as ‘all brawn and no brains’ is a very inaccurate label often placed upon them. Being a fisherman is something that can only be truly learned through experience (Williams 2008). The expectation that fishermen would, on the whole, possess little in the way of formal education beyond school or college is therefore confirmed.

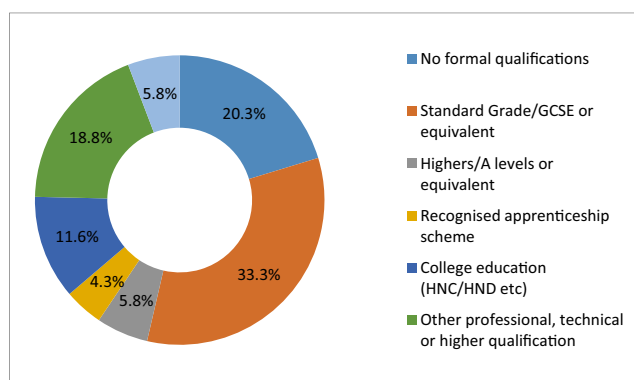
Fishermen show a relatively high level of religious affiliation (Fig. 4, below). Compared to the Scottish public (BBC News 2016), fishermen are more likely to state they hold a religious identity. However, a significant majority (36%) do not hold a religious identity, perhaps a sign that the movement away from religious belief in Scottish society is also happening in the fishing industry. The data is limited in that the frequency of attendance at church or the depth of religious feeling was outside the scope of this study. Nevertheless, the expectation that fishermen would be a group that would perhaps identify more strongly with religion than the public as a whole is clearly highlighted in the data.

The expectation that fishermen would likely be part of either a long-term relationship or a marriage is also highlighted in the data. Figure 5 shows the prevalence of long-term relationships with a spouse amongst fishermen, with the vast

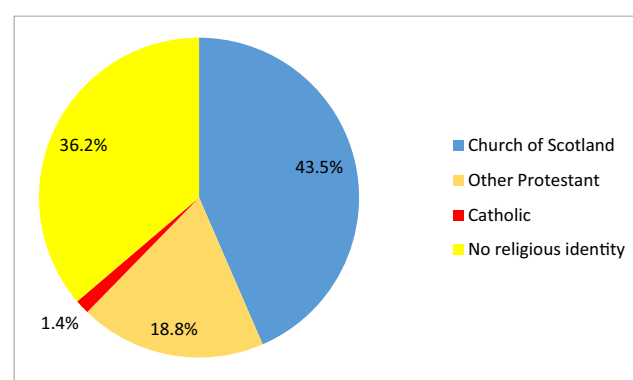
majority of respondents (81%) stating that they are married. According to the relevant BES data, 50% of the Scottish public are married, with a further 11% living as married. The proportion of married skippers is therefore far higher than the Scottish public as a whole and thus confirms the importance of long-term relationships to fishermen and the key role women play in the functioning of a fishing household highlighted by Williams (2008). Overall, the findings in this section generally confirm the expectations deriving from the literature. Skippers are older, likely to be married, do not tend to possess qualifications beyond the qualifications they require before going to sea, and do tend to see themselves as possessing a religious identity, in this case a Protestant one.

### Vote choice, trust in government and national identity

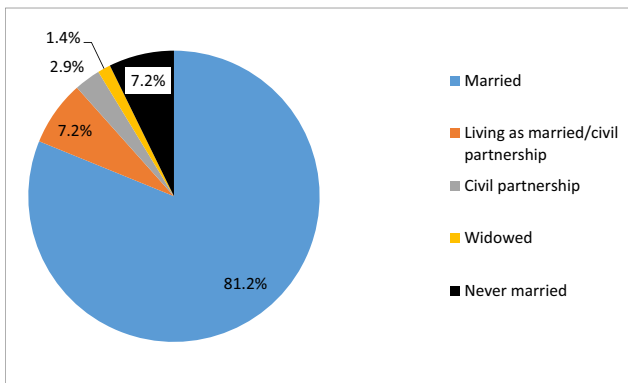
Figure 6 shows how fishermen voted at the last two elections held in Scotland, the 2015 UK General Election and the 2016 Scottish election (at which there are two ballot papers, see McAngus (2016) for an overview). At the 2015 UK general



**Fig. 3** Educational attainment of Scottish fishermen ( $N = 69$ )



**Fig. 4** Religious identity of Scottish fishermen ( $N = 69$ )



**Fig. 5** Marital status of Scottish fishermen ( $N = 69$ )

election, a large minority of fishermen voted for the Conservatives, with the SNP also attracting a sizeable percentage of voters. Despite having next to no chance of winning a seat in Scotland at this election, 12% of fishermen opted to vote for UKIP, most likely because of the party's unequivocal support for leaving the EU. This closely resembles the level of support that UKIP received across the UK as a whole (12.6%) at this particular election.

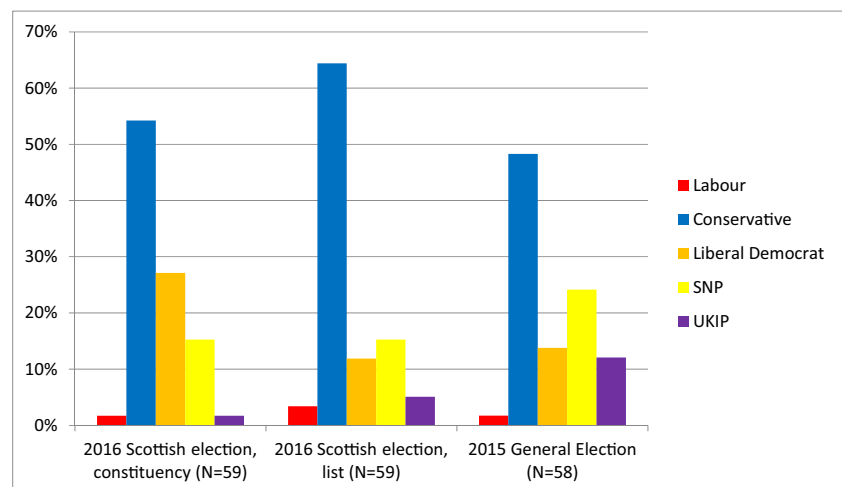
At the 2016 Scottish Parliamentary election, a larger proportion of fishermen voted for the Conservatives than at the 2015 general election. Interestingly, the proportion voting for the SNP was markedly down on both ballots. The Liberal Democrats did well amongst fishermen on the constituency vote, substantially outstripping the share of the vote they received in Scotland as a whole (7.8%). This is due to the fact that a number of survey respondents had a registered vessel in Shetland, an area of traditional Liberal Democrat strength. It may also point towards anti-SNP tactical voting in constituencies where the Liberal Democrats were best placed to challenge the SNP. At the 2017 general election, the Conservatives won a number of seats in Scotland, such as Moray and Banff and Buchan, that had previously voted SNP and which

contain a number of important fishing ports. This survey was carried out in advance of that event, but it is possible that fishing and its relationship to Brexit may have played a role in the swing away from the SNP towards the Conservatives.

These explanations make sense in a First-Past-The-Post electoral contest, examples being UK general elections and the constituency vote for Scottish Parliament vote, but it does not account for the fact that the largest proportion of fishermen voted Conservative on the regional list vote at Scottish Parliament elections. The list vote provides an opportunity for voters to register a vote for a party that would normally not have much of a chance in their constituency. Essentially, it means that a voter has less of an incentive to vote tactically and vote for the party they may actually support. Therefore, it is likely that fishermen vote Scottish Conservative because they support the aims and policies of the Conservative party.

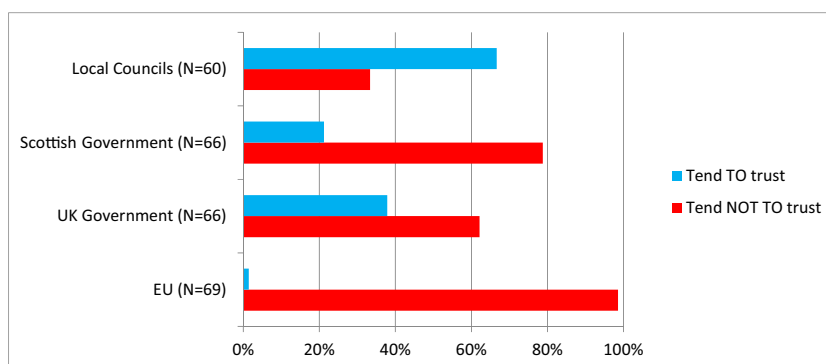
Unlike the Scottish population as a whole (Reid et al. 2014: 8), fishermen tend to trust the UK Government more than the Scottish Government (see Fig. 7, below). At first glance, this may seem like a paradoxical finding given that it is a commonly held view that Ted Heath's Conservative government sold the fishing industry out when the UK joined the EEC in 1973 (The Scotsman 2003). There are two explanations for this. The first is that Marine Scotland, a Directorate of the Scottish Government, is responsible for managing Scotland's seas and its representatives are therefore in day-to-day contact with fishermen regarding regulations and quotas. Because fishermen often feel like 'criminals' in their dealings with the 'enforcement' agencies (Williams 2008: 123–125; Pettersen 1996), it may be that this lack of trust in the authorities directly results in a relatively negative attitude towards the Scottish Government. This is a rational response given that Marine Scotland could enforce the CFP in a somewhat different way, but ultimately the Scottish Government is not responsible for the negotiations that lead to the TAC and resulting quotas at the European level. Indeed, fisheries are very much a

**Fig. 6** Parties voted for by Scottish fishermen at the 2016 Scottish election and 2015 general election in Scotland





**Fig. 7** Trust in governing institutions by Scottish fishermen



‘Europeanized’ policy area despite not being reserved to the UK level in Schedule V of the 1998 Scotland Act. The minister responsible for fisheries in the Scottish Government is indeed bound by the principle of collective responsibility when it comes to decisions taken after yearly negotiations and thus may well have to argue that Scottish fishermen have received a good deal despite not actually believing so (Cairney and McGarvey 2013: 211–213).

The second relates to Scotland’s constitutional question (see below). At the 2014 Scottish independence referendum, a majority (72%) of fishermen voted No and thus for Scotland to remain part of the UK. Furthermore, a majority of fishermen at the past two elections in Scotland have voted for ‘unionist’ parties may mean that their relative lack of trust in the Scottish Government is linked to their constitutional preferences and their potential dislike of the SNP. Unfortunately, this is a speculative analysis given that the survey did not contain the questions in order to empirically prove that this is indeed the case.

However, the relative lack of trust in the Scottish government is not linked to fishermen shunning a strong sense of Scottish identity (see Fig. 8). Indeed, 70% of fishermen feel ‘very strongly’ Scottish compared to 50% who feel ‘very strongly’ British. Literature on national identity in Scotland and its relationship to Scotland’s constitutional question show that possessing a very strong Scottish identity does not necessarily mean support for Scottish independence, with research showing that support for Scottish independence is more likely to be driven by a rejection of Britishness (Curtice 2013). This is clearly not the case with fishermen who, feeling strongly Scottish, also feel strongly British.

## Political values

The literature on fishermen suggests that they may be more libertarian and more right wing than the population as a whole. The fact that the largest proportion of fishermen surveyed vote Conservative provides some indication of

this, but it is necessary to analyse variables which measure where fishermen place themselves on the Left-Right and Libertarian-Authoritarian scales respectively. The survey borrowed five questions from the British Election Study which ask respondents their attitude towards issues like redistribution and abuse of power by management. The answers to these questions are interesting in their own, but it is possible to use a statistical technique called factor analysis (see Table 1 for the results of the factor analysis) in order to ascertain whether or not they point towards an underlying latent variable. If a latent variable exists then it is possible to combine the data from the questions used to construct it in order to place respondents on a left-right scale.<sup>2</sup>

Fishermen’s mean score was 10.4 out of 20 on the left-right score, 0 being ‘right’ and 20 being ‘left’ (Fig. 9). Furthermore, this is 4.5 points lower than the Scottish public as a whole, highlighting that, on average, fishermen are substantially to the right of the Scottish public when it comes to questions about redistribution and relations between management and employees, for example. However, it would be a mistake to suggest that fishermen are ‘right wing’, and are actually quite a centrist group, with the Scottish population substantially to the left. Indeed, to say that this is because fishermen are therefore strong advocates of neoliberal economics is probably missing the cultural understanding of work and management in the fishing industry. Fishermen traditionally earned the right to a full ‘share’ of profits from a catch, and the old idiom that ‘the captain goes down with the ship’ usually holds true given that skipper and crew are all literally on the same boat and face the same existential dangers when at sea.

<sup>2</sup> Factor analysis is a statistical technique that attempts to discover a latent variable based on the correlation of observed data. In this case, questions about redistribution and management are asked of the respondent which, theoretically, ‘factor’ together to form a latent variable in the form of a left-right scale. Questions about authority, morality and censorship are also theoretically expected to factor together to form an authoritarian-libertarian scale. Once a latent variable has been statistically identified, it is possible to combine these variables to create a scale.

**Fig. 8** Strength of national identities held by Scottish fishermen

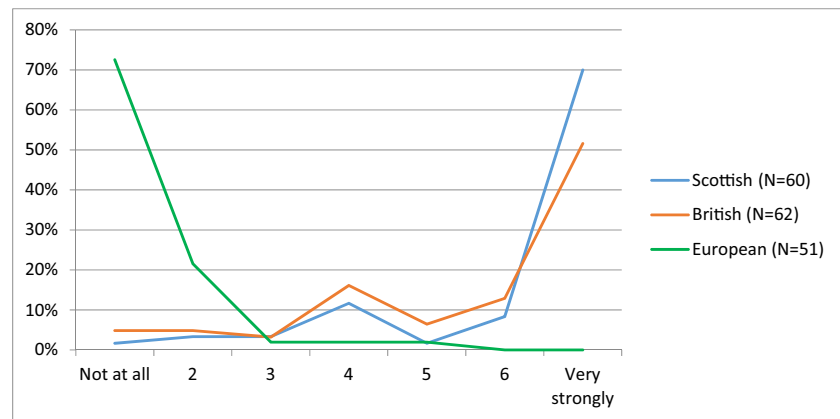


Figure 9 also compares fishermen and the Scottish public on the Libertarian-Authoritarian scale. The construction of this scale is done using the same technique as the left-right scale previously. However, in this case, the scale only goes to 16 because of the questions in the fishermen survey did not load on to a factor. Therefore, it was omitted from the scale and the same question was omitted from the scale constructed using the BES data. The findings show that while fishermen are slightly more authoritarian on average than the Scottish public as a whole, the difference is relatively small (1.1 points). Fishermen differ from the Scottish public in that they are, on average, more centrist rather than being more socially conservative.

## Constitutional attitudes: Brexit and Scottish independence

Questions were asked in the survey about how fishermen intended to vote in the EU referendum, as well as how they voted in the Scottish independence referendum in

2014. Figure 10 shows the voting intention of Scottish fishermen ahead of the EU referendum. There is near unequivocal support for leaving the EU: 93% stated that they would indeed vote leave on June 23rd 2016. Although this level of support for leaving the EU is somewhat unsurprising, the fact that it is so high highlights the complete failure of the CFP to articulate to Scottish fishermen that remaining in the EU was beneficial to their interests.

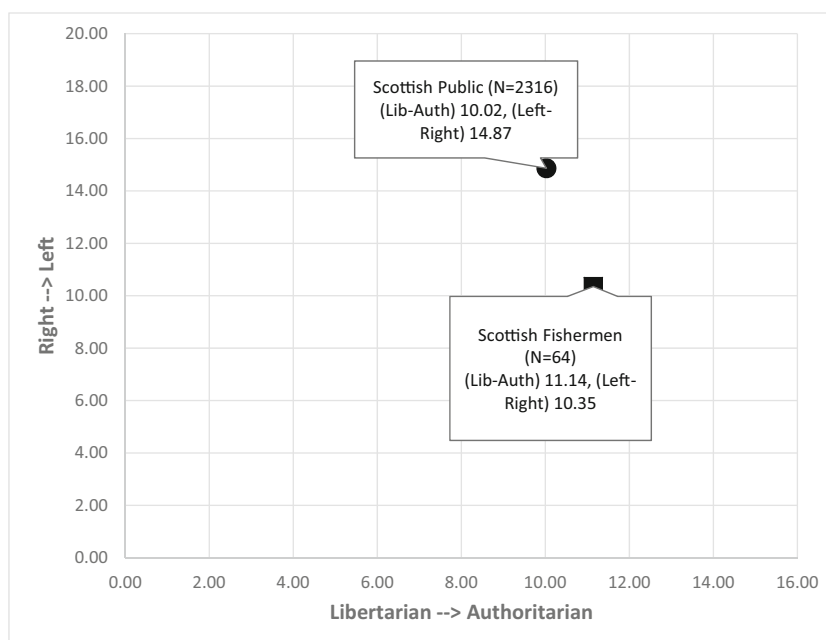
Given that 93% of Scottish fishermen intended to vote to leave the EU, it is no surprise that they have practically no trust in the EU as a governing institution. Williams (2008: 38) found that fishermen felt excluded from the processes of the CFP which led to quotas and days at sea being allocated. Even attempts to take into account the social impact of the policy tend to focus on measurements of employment levels in fishing communities rather than a more holistic appreciation of the impact that the CFP and decommissioning of vessels has had on communities (Brookfield et al. 2005; Jacob et al. 2001).

The depth of antipathy towards the EU is further highlighted in Table 2. None of the survey respondents felt

**Table 1** Results of factor analysis for ideological and values variables for Scottish fishermen

Left-right variables		Libertarian-authoritarian variables	
Government should redistribute income from the better off to those who are less well off.	0.573	For some crimes, the death penalty is the most appropriate sentence.	0.685
Big business takes advantage of ordinary people.	0.756	Schools should teach children to obey authority.	0.819
Ordinary people do not get their fair share of the country's wealth.	0.853	Censorship of films and magazines is necessary to uphold moral standards.	0.676
There is one law for the rich and one for the poor.	0.798	People who break the law should be given stiffer sentences.	0.737
Management will always try to get the better of employees if it gets the chance.	0.650		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy.	0.687	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy.	0.721
Sig.	0.000	Sig.	0.000
Variance explained	53.7%	Variance explained	53.50%

**Fig. 9** Ideology and values of Scottish fishermen compared to the Scottish public

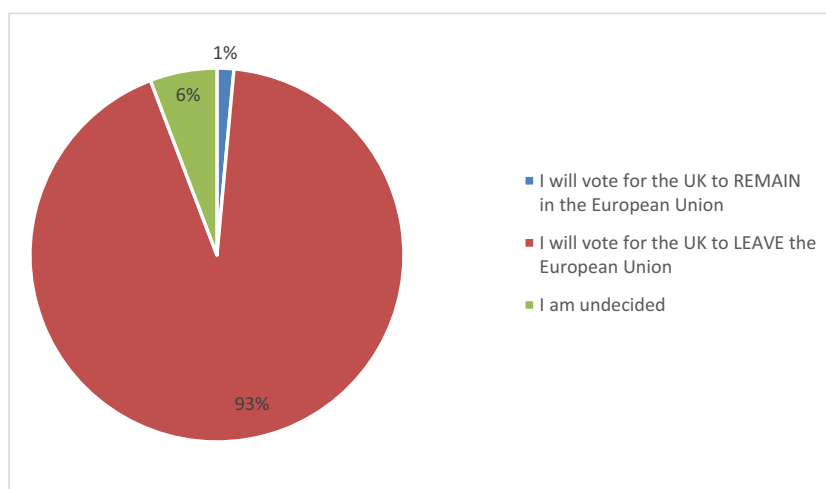


in any way positive about the EU, with 90% holding a negative view of the institution. The second half of Table 2 highlights answers to a range of questions on opinions related to the EU, which clearly points towards the depth of Euroscepticism and alienation from EU institutions that fishermen feel. It must be noted, however, that this alienation is not as a result of not understanding how the EU works. A large majority of fishermen agree that they know how the EU works which is presumably facilitated by a keen interest in the annual negotiations in the Council of Ministers on TACs and the CFP in general.

A number of questions were asked regarding what respondents thought the impact of leaving the EU and the CFP would be. These questions covered the impact of

leaving on trade of fish to other countries, the amount of fish they could catch, the freedom to fish in UK territorial waters and the overall impact on the fishing industry as a whole. Responses were measured on a 5-point ordinal scale ranging from 'a very negative' impact to a 'very positive' impact. In order to assess whether or not the obvious Euroscepticism fishermen possess emanated from their antipathy towards the CFP or whether it stemmed from a more general Euroscepticism more widely shared with the Scottish and British public, the relationship between these variables and variables assessing their opinions on the impact Brexit would have on levels of immigration, control over borders and the performance of the economy were examined. The logic here is that if there are

**Fig. 10** Voting intention of Scottish fishermen at the 2016 EU referendum



**Table 2** Image of the EU held and attitudes towards the EU

	Very positive	Fairly positive	Neither positive nor negative	Fairly negative	Very negative
Image of the EU ( <i>N</i> = 68)	0.0%	0.0%	10.3%	25.0%	64.7%
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
My voice counts in the EU ( <i>N</i> = 69)	4.3%	2.9%	1.4%	18.8%	72.5%
I understand how the EU works ( <i>N</i> = 69)	21.2%	48.5%	13.6%	9.1%	7.6%
The interests of the UK are well taken into account in the EU ( <i>N</i> = 69)	1.5%	1.5%	4.5%	25.4%	67.2%
The EU is working for you ( <i>N</i> = 69)	0.0%	4.8%	1.6%	23.8%	69.8%

significant and positive relationships between specific benefits that the fishing industry would enjoy and wider benefits that were a major aspect of the public discourse on Brexit then we could not say that the Euroscepticism that fishermen is exclusively instrumental.

In order to measure the relationship between these variables, Kendall Tau-C tests were run on crosstabulations of all combinations of these variables. This test measures relationships between two ordinal level variables. Of all combinations, three showed significant relationships: freedom to fish and trade ( $T_c = .163$ ,  $p = .011$ ), freedom to fish and the general performance of the UK economy ( $T_c = .235$ ,  $p = .039$ ), and the amount of fish that could be caught and trade of fish ( $T_c = .192$ ,  $p = .011$ ). These findings highlight instrumental justifications for Brexit given that a perceived benefit of leaving the CFP (freedom to fish and the amount of fish that can be caught) are positively related to instrumental outcomes of such benefits (trade with the EU and the performance of the UK economy).

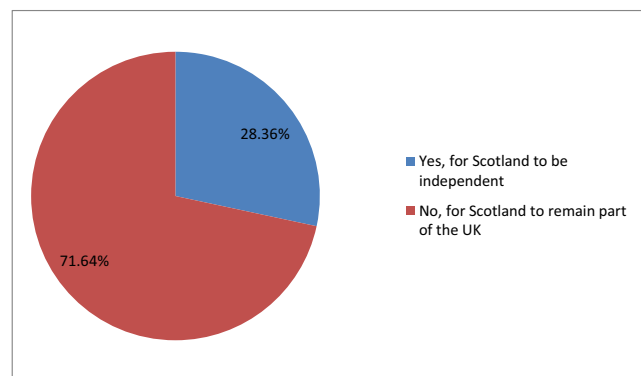
In 2014, a referendum was held on whether Scotland should be an independent country. A majority (55%) elected to remain in the UK in this vote. The Scottish Government, which was a majority SNP one, argued in its white paper outlining the blueprint for an independent Scotland that, should Scotland be independent, that ‘as an independent member state, Scotland will [sic] be negotiating as one of the foremost and most respected fishing nations in Europe’ which would provide ‘the opportunity to take a leadership role in reforming the Common Fisheries Policy’ and thus ‘keep Scottish quota in Scotland’ (Scottish Government 2013: 17).

The argument that the Scottish Government were essentially making was that Scotland, as a member state of the EU, would take the interests of fishermen into account to a greater degree than had been done within the UK. However, fishermen do not appear to have agreed with this analysis (see Fig. 11). Goodlad (1993: 52) posits the question about whether fishermen are ‘conservative nationalists’ or ‘nationalist conservatives’. On the question of Scottish independence, they appear to be very much conservative: 72% voted No and thus for Scotland to remain within the UK. They are therefore a very ‘unionist’ group given that the overall result of that

particular referendum was a 55% majority in favour of remaining part of the UK.

The EU referendum campaign and result manifested itself very differently in Scotland compared to the rest of the UK. The vast majority of political elites in Scotland campaigned for a Remain vote, and the overall result was a 62% majority in favour of remaining in the EU. Comparable figures for the Scottish public show that 65% of Yes voters intended to vote Remain compared to 61% of No voters. The SNP has taken an explicitly pro-EU stance, both rhetorically and in official party policy, since the late 1980s, and this pattern of support for Remain amongst Yes voters is not shared by fishermen.

For those fishermen who voted Yes, 89.5% intended to vote to leave the EU, with the remaining 10.5% undecided about how they would vote (see Table 3). Independence voting fishermen do not see Scotland being an independent member state within the EU, but rather as an independent nation-state outside of the EU. However, with a tenth of independence voting fishermen undecided how they would vote ahead of the EU referendum, it may well be the case that their support for an independent Scotland affected their decision-making process to a certain degree. However, this is a small minority of this group, and it is likely that fishermen who support Scottish independence perhaps look to Norway as a model of independent statehood that would suit the interests of

**Fig. 11** Voting in the 2014 Scottish independence referendum by fishermen

**Table 3** Intention to vote in 2016 EU referendum according to vote in 2014 Scottish independence referendum ( $N = 67$ )

	I will vote for the UK to remain in the European Union	I will vote for the UK to leave the European Union	I am undecided
I voted Yes, for Scotland to be independent	0.0%	89.5%	10.5%
I voted No, for Scotland to remain part of the UK	2.1%	93.8%	4.2%

A number of statistical tests appropriate for categorical data were run in order to ascertain whether there was a significant relationship between the two variables, which there was not

their industry, although the lack of a relevant question in the survey means that this assertion cannot be tested empirically.

## Conclusion

Despite there being a substantial amount of literature on fishermen and their families, the attitudes of fishermen to management and governance of fisheries, and the policy element of the governance of fisheries, there is a lack of literature that tries to understand how they vote and what their social and political values are using survey methodology. This paper is an attempt to plug that gap. Furthermore, much of the relevant literature utilised in this paper uses qualitative methodology to gather and analyse data. By using quantitative survey methodology, this paper was able to draw on the findings of studies using alternative methodologies and, by and large, was able to confirm much of those findings and expand upon. As well as being exploratory in that the paper drew on literature from a number of disciplines and aimed to cast light on an under-researched topic, this paper has also helped to triangulate the findings from these other studies using an alternative methodological perspective.

On the whole, the findings of the survey confirmed what previous literature posited about fishermen, namely skippers. They tend to be older, possess little formal education beyond college level, married and state a religious affiliation (mainly Church of Scotland in this case). Studies such as that by Williams (Williams 2008, see also Nadel-Klein 2003; and Nadel-Klein and Davis 1988) through qualitative methods were able to delve into these dynamics in a significant amount of depth, but this paper has been able to generalise these findings within a margin of error.

The fact that fishermen in Scotland tend to vote Conservative confirmed some of the tentative evidence that this was the case. Of course, this can only be said for skippers, and it remains unknown as to how those who work on vessels in other capacities vote. It may be that in this regard, fishermen are similar to the so-called *petty bourgeoisie* who have gravitated towards the Conservatives at previous general elections (Denver 1998, 2007). However, the Conservatives have, in recent years, made holding a referendum on EU membership a manifesto pledge. Voting

Conservative is therefore a mechanism for Eurosceptic fishermen to articulate their policy preferences; that a comparatively high proportion of Scottish fishermen have cast a vote for UKIP is further indication of this behaviour. Furthermore, fishermen in Scotland were strongly behind remaining in the UK at the 2014 Scottish independence referendum and the Scottish Conservatives have positioned themselves as the leading unionist party who do not want to see a second independence referendum in the near future. Furthermore, findings showing that fishermen are positioned in the centre of the left-right spectrum but still left of the Scottish public give some credence to the notion that they are a relatively conservative group.

Unsurprisingly, fishermen are very Eurosceptic. An overwhelming majority stated that they intended to vote to leave the EU. Further examination found that their reasoning was very much instrumental in that they believe that leaving the EU and the CFP will benefit their industry. There was very little evidence that issues driving the vote choice of many leave voters in the UK, such as immigration, were driving their decision to vote leave. Fishermen, on the whole, appear to have made a carefully calculated and rational judgement to vote leave based on their negative perceptions of the CFP and its impact on their industry.

This paper has made an attempt to shed light on the political and social characteristics of fishermen in Scotland, although its scope was limited given the lack of research funding. Only skippers were surveyed and thus only a minority of those working in the industry, albeit an important one. A project that can reach more of those who work on fishing vessels around the UK would give a more rounded picture of the industry and highlight similarities and differences between those who skipper boats and those who fill other roles at sea. Moreover, the uncertainty surrounding the Brexit process and the subsequent outcome of the negotiations between the UK and the EU means that the future governance arrangements of fisheries in Scotland and the UK are still an unknown entity. As such, fishermen would be an interesting and worthwhile group to survey again in the future.

## Compliance with ethical standards

**Competing interests** The authors declare that they have no competing interests.



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